The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM C. BURDETT

Interviewed by: Richard Nethercut

Initial interview date: December 16, 1988

This interview is being conducted with Ambassador William C. Burdett on December 16, 1988 at his home in Gloucester as part of The Association for Diplomatic Studies Oral History project. The interviewer is Richard Nethercut. Ambassador Burdett has kindly provided additional explanatory material that will be appended to this interview.

Q: Ambassador Burdett could you explain how you happened to get involved in a career in the Foreign Service?

BURDETT: My father joined the Foreign Service in 1924. I followed in his footsteps and entered the Service in 1941 after graduating from Princeton. Except for a brief time in the US Marine Corps during World War II, my entire working career was spent in the Foreign Service.

Q: Your Foreign Service career spanned a great number of years. Could you tell me for the purposes of this interview which segments of your career you think were of the most importance?

BURDETT: I think my service in the Middle Eastern area involved me more directly in policy questions and matters of national interests than any other.

Q: Well that then should be a good starting point. The Mid-East is very much on peoples' minds now in view of the possible breakthrough in Arab-US dialogue. Could you tell me about your involvement in Mid-East policy and which assignments were the most significant?

BURDETT: My first assignment after discharge from the Marine Corps was to Basra, Iraq, as a Vice Consul. At that time we were also responsible for covering Kuwait. An early memory is of the old sheikh turning a large golden valve opening the first oil pipeline from the Kuwait fields. We were also responsible for coverage of the Abadan area in southern Iran. My first significant involvement in US policy towards the Middle East arose during an assignment to Jerusalem. I went there in May of 1948 as a Vice Consul 0-5, Foreign Service Officer-Class Five, arriving four days before British troop withdrew. Unhappily our Consul General, Thomas Wasson, was killed by a sniper several days later. As a consequence I became Acting Consul General and the US member of the (UN) Security Council Truce Mission.

Q: That must have been quite an unusual experience for somebody at such a junior point in his career. Can you recall some of the feelings you had, and how this worked out?

BURDETT: The entire situation was unusual. Jerusalem was divided into Jewish and Arab sectors with feelings of apprehension all around. There was sporadic firing, mortar barrages, some of the shells falling in the Consulate General compound. Our movements were limited, but we maintained telephone contact with the British Consulate General in the Arab sector. The British proved most helpful throughout in keeping us abreast of developments in the rest of Palestine. I attended meetings of the Security Council Truce Commission in the French Consulate General. We were in regular communication with officers of the Jewish Agency, and the Jewish Defense Forces. Occasionally, we could also reach the commander of the Arab Legion in the old city of Jerusalem, and other Arab officials. Fortunately, we established early a close working relationship with Colonel Moshe Dayan, commander of Israeli forces in Jerusalem.

Q: What about communications with the State Department? Were they reliable and did you get rather detailed guidance, or were you forced to make a number of decisions on your own?

BURDETT: Shortly prior to the British withdrawal the State Department established a Naval Communications unit across an alley from the Consulate. We had our own generator and thus perhaps the best communications that existed in Jerusalem with the outside world. We could receive messages almost instantaneously from Washington. In the confusion then existing the Department allowed us to take the initiative in determining our activities and reporting to the extent we could. The Department realized the restrictions on our movements and did not press us for jobs that were not feasible. We made the facilities of our communications unit available to members of the American press.

Q: You mentioned that one of the people you negotiated with, or had contact with, was Colonel Moshe Dayan. Would you care to elaborate on this contact with him?

BURDETT: As a member of the Security Council Truce Commission we worked with Colonel Dayan and Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah el Tel of the Arab Legion and UNTSO in drawing up detailed cease fire lines for the Jerusalem area and monitoring the truces. Dayan was a tough negotiator but as a Sabra knew and had grown up with the Arabs. Fortunately the personal relations between Dayan and el Tel were good which facilitated the work of the Truce Commission.

Q: Looking back now in the context of subsequent American policy towards the area, what effect do you think your role at this time had on subsequent American policy in the area?

BURDETT: We encountered constant difficulties with the Jewish civilian authorities and had the impression that they would reach an agreement and when they thought it advantageous would ignore it. This was shown in the question of bringing supplies to Jerusalem after the Security Council imposed truce. We became involved in a public controversy with Bernard Joseph, the top civilian Jewish official. The truce agreement provided for a "standstill" so that neither side could take advantage of the truce to improve its position. Contrary to this provision Jewish trucks entered Jerusalem regularly, ignoring a check point the Security Council Truce Commission tried to establish. Most importantly the Jews took advantage of the truce period to construct what was known as the "Burma Road" beyond the range of Arab Legion guns linking Jerusalem to the main Jewish areas. Thus, by the end of the truce the Jewish authorities had successfully broken the siege of Jerusalem. Thereafter they enjoyed military superiority in the area, while before that this advantage had rested with the Arab Legion.

Q: I see. Now at what point did you then complete your assignment as Acting Consul General, and did you stay on in Jerusalem after a new Consul General had been appointed, or what happened?

BURDETT: During the summer of 1948 John MacDonald was assigned as Consul General. He was transferred shortly thereafter, and I resumed charge of our office just before the assassination of the UN mediator Bernadotte. I was then in charge of the office until early in 1950 when a new Consul General arrived, and I was transferred to Tabriz.

Q: Did this experience in Jerusalem stamp you as a Mid-East specialist and have an impact on your subsequent career development?

BURDETT: Unfortunately I am not an "Arabist", and have no scholastic or linguistic knowledge of the Middle East. I've maintained a professional interest in the area ever since and did receive assignments related to that area through a large part of my career.

Q: From Jerusalem I judge that you were subsequently involved in the Mid-East crisis involving the Suez Canal. Could you please explain your involvement there?

BURDETT: From Iran I was transferred to the Department and assigned to the Office of Near Eastern Affairs and then the Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs. President Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal in 1956 marked the failure of an ambitious program of Secretary Dulles intended to seal off the area from "international communism". To contain Soviet expansion, Mr. Dulles adopted a policy of impartiality in the Arab-Israel problem and set about creating a Middle East Defense arrangement. I participated in developing a detailed proposal for a comprehensive Middle East settlement. We thought Israel obtained word of our plans (Israeli intelligence on our planning was "remarkable" indicating inside leaks), found them distasteful, and deliberately adopted policies including aggressive border raids, to make it politically difficult for Nasser to move towards an accommodation. At the same time Israel's supporters in Congress blocked the provision of military aid. In 1955 Nasser reached the conclusion that he could not count upon the United States to restrain Israel politically. He also concluded that the US would not meet his requests for military assistance sufficient to enable him to protect Egypt from Israeli aggression. Nasser decided to turn to the Soviet Union for military assistance. Increasingly he adopted a non-aligned anti-Western stance.

The deterioration in relations was rapid. In the summer of 1956 we replied negatively to the Egyptian demand for a "yes" or "no" answer on an outstanding offer to finance the Aswan Dam. Nasser used this in part as a pretext for nationalizing the Suez Canal. A mighty scramble then ensued to find ways to assure the continued international use of the canal and to provide the British and French a face saving alternative to the use of force to regain control of the canal. Two major conferences were held in London. Nasser in effect rejected the proposals coming from those conferences. In late summer of 1956 the British and French military preparations were well publicized. However, we thought these were in the nature of bargaining postures and contingency planning. The actual decision of Britain, France and Israel to attack the Suez Canal caught us by surprise. We made a last minute effort to forestall the attack unsuccessfully.

The Administration was then confronted with an "agonizing reappraisal". President Eisenhower decided that we had no alternative but to oppose the British, French and the Israelis.

Q: You were very much involved on the Washington end of things and I wonder if you could describe how the State Department related in this case to the formulation and the implementation of President Eisenhower's policy?

BURDETT: Once the decision was made to oppose the British, French and Israeli attack, Secretary Dulles became in effect the "Desk Officer". Our efforts were coordinated by his office. I was the bag carrier when Bob Murphy was sent to London to reconnoiter prior to the attack, and I served as "bookkeeper" in the sense of assembling briefing books and doing staff work.

Q: What was Bob Murphy's capacity in this situation?

BURDETT: Bob Murphy was Deputy Under Secretary of State and was our preeminent authority on military-political matters, a man who had great influence with our Western allies.

Q: I judge as a matter of fact Ambassador Murphy had played a role during World War II with both the British and...

BURDETT: ...the Free French. Right. He was our representative to the Free French movement in North Africa, for example.

Q: What was the impact of his efforts this time to maintain the relationship with France and the UK?

BURDETT: By the time we reached London the British and French had taken an irrevocable decision.

Q: Then in the aftermath of the invasion of the Suez Canal, what sort of policies did we adopt toward our allies?

BURDETT: We sought to find ways to repair the damage both to our relations with our allies and to the Western position in the Middle East. One outcome was the so-called "Eisenhower Doctrine", embodied in a joint resolution of the Congress. This resolution provided in essence for US military intervention against overt aggression by "international Communism", and for US economic and military assistance to help countries of the area cope with indirect aggression. To bring this policy to the attention of the countries of the area the President despatched the Richards Mission which traveled to some 15 countries over a two month period, and was able to offer specific amounts of military and economic aid on the spot, a very welcome difference from the normal US procedure.

Q: What was your role in the Richards Mission?

BURDETT: I was involved in drawing up the concept of the Eisenhower Doctrine, drafting the Joint Resolution, and accompanying Ambassador Richards on his mission.

Q: How was the Eisenhower Doctrine received in Congress, and what was the implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine with respect to Congress?

BURDETT: The proposed Joint Resolution was drafted in the Department and discussed with the Congress which made various drafting changes. There was wide support. This was an example of an advance Congressional stamp of approval on a foreign policy and served to demonstrate to the world the unity of the legislative and executive branches of the US Government. It eliminated the possibility of splits between the executive and the legislative which impede the Executive from carrying out courses of action it deems in the US interest. We were able to get the Congress on board at the beginning of the operation.

Q: What was the connection between this Joint Resolution of Congress signed by the President and the Richards Mission?

BURDETT: The Richards Mission armed with the authority of the Joint Resolution proceeded to the Middle East and was able to reassure the countries of US support and give tangible evidence of that support by extending on the spot military and economic aid in specific amounts. We thought the Mission succeeded in helping to stabilize the Western position.

Q: After your service in the Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs, and following your work on the Richards Mission, I see that you went to Embassy London and served there for three years. Did you have some responsibilities with regard to Mid Eastern policy, and what was the effect of this assignment with regard to British-US relations toward the Mid-East?

BURDETT: I was assigned to London as the officer responsible for Middle Eastern and later also African affairs. Gratifyingly, British resentment at the US role in the Suez matter did not interfere with a close working relationship with the Foreign Office. Our "special relationship" covered exchanges of information, intelligence assessments, and operational matters. Many in the Foreign Office had opposed the military attack on Egypt, and they were also pleased that the US was taking a more active role in the Middle East. The British are extremely pragmatic people, and there was wide realization that the UK no longer had the power to play the dominant Western role in the Middle East.

Q: After your service in London I see that you were in the State Department for another four years and then went to Ankara as Minister Counselor at the Embassy and during this period served as Charge for several lengths of time. Could you highlight some of the problems that you encountered in this assignment and what you consider to be some of the most important aspects you were involved in?

BURDETT: Cyprus was one of the most difficult problems in relations with Turkey. A major crisis developed soon after my arrival in Ankara in late 1967. The Turks made obvious preparations for a military invasion with troops boarded on transports. To avert a landing President Johnson assigned Cyrus Vance as Presidential Envoy to Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. "Frank" negotiations ensued. Turkish President Sunay postponed the landing to give Vance time to make one more effort with Makarios. Happily Makarios accepted, in effect, the Turkish terms and the invasion was called off. The next time the Turkish troops landed and we're still suffering the consequences. The Turks felt we let them down in failing to oblige Makarios to meet his commitments.

Q: In addition to the relations with Cyprus while you were in Turkey, were there other aspects of particular significance in our policy toward Turkey while you were there?

BURDETT: The bulk of our time on the operational side was taken up with matters involving the large US military presence in Turkey to bolster NATO. There were negotiations on the status of forces requiring special attention to Turkish nationalist sensitivities, and arrangements for visits by the Sixth Fleet. Our AID program was extensive. We achieved remarkable success in introducing into Turkey a new type of wheat which enabled the farmers greatly to increase their yield. We also had a major Peace Corps program, but with the Peace Corps difficulties developed during the Vietnam period when volunteers sought to protest against US policy toward Vietnam.

Q: That must have been interesting. How did the Turks react to this evident displeasure with US policy by a portion of the Embassy?

BURDETT: These demonstrations did damage to our relations with Turkey. Unfortunately members of the AID mission and even a few Army officers took part. They culminated in picketing the Embassy. Under Turkish law picketing cannot be conducted without permission. To avoid arrest of the pickets and sensitive to the growing anti-Vietnam movement at home, the Ambassador permitted the demonstrations within the Embassy compound. I think this was a humiliating experience and brought mockery from the Turks who were amazed that such a thing could happen.

Q: During your assignment to Turkey you had three stints as Chargï¿½ d'Affaires and so during two of those times you then reverted to the position of Deputy Chief of Mission. Could you describe a bit of the transition process that you went through as two new Ambassadors came in the course of your assignment to Ankara?

BURDETT: Service as Chargï¿½ is inherently difficult, but lots of fun. The uncertain time element weighs upon you. You are one man short at the top; members of the Country Team are "restless", although in Turkey most cooperative, when your term is short and your authority less clear cut than that of the Ambassador; you lack time for your own policy input and for developing your own tactics to execute policy.

The assignment of Robert Komer, prominently involved in the rural pacification program in Vietnam caused us difficulties. His name had appeared frequently in the Turkish press. At the time there was a growing leftist movement in Turkey and vocal opposition to our Vietnam policy, especially on the part of university students. A large demonstration greeted Komer's arrival, and we were obliged to stop his plane and unload far out on the airfield. It was, of course, a considerable embarrassment and irritating to Komer. A few days later in the official limousine with flags flying, he drove against staff advice to make calls on the university Rector. During this meeting Turkish students seized and burned the limousine. Both incidents made his mission more difficult. A lesson is the need to take into account the global repercussions of US policies even in the assignment process.

Q: I see. Was this also true with respect to Ambassador Komer's replacement?

BURDETT: Ambassador Handley was an experienced career officer knowledgeable about the Middle East and the transition went smoothly.

Q: In summing up your assignment to Ankara then, were there some principle impressions you gathered that influenced you in your subsequent assignment as Ambassador to Malawi?

BURDETT: There is a great gulf between Turkey and Malawi. Our policies toward each are completely different. To finish with Turkey, I developed a great respect for the Turks. They are strongly anti-Russian, not just anti-Communist, and I believe can be counted upon in terms of Western defense. They are a stubborn, proud people who respect the slogan, "An enemy of my friend, is my enemy." They have been disappointed in the United States because of our perceived bias on the question of Cyprus in favor of Greece. Their enmity with Greece is deep-seated. The Turks have major economic problems and have been grateful for US aid in the economic field. They have made good use of our economic and military aid and contribute in a major way to NATO. Often overlooked is their assistance in the intelligence field.

Q: Fine. Let's turn now to your appointment as a Chief of Mission and could you describe how that came about and how you felt about being assigned to a country with which you presumably had not had a great deal of contact in the past?

BURDETT: The assignment to Malawi came out of the blue. Apparently the Department was under instructions from Secretary Kissinger to assign senior officers as Chief of Mission and to place officers in areas where they had not previously served in the belief that they would then be less likely to become advocates of a particular country. My assignment to Malawi was the most placid of my career without the stimulation of participating in formulating and executing policies to cope with national security concerns. The chief success of that assignment was inducing President Bamba to support the US policy towards Vietnam, including by voting with us in the UN.

Q: Let's backtrack just a moment if we might. You mentioned that you were assigned really out of your area of previous experience and specialization to a post in Africa partly in connection with Secretary Kissinger's Global Outlook Policy. I wonder how you felt toward this assignment? How you prepared for it, and then your impressions as a Chief of Mission in an African post which must have contrasted very sharply with the other posts that you had served in?

BURDETT: I was disappointed to go to a post in an area about which I knew little and had not previously developed an interest. I did not see much in the way of opportunities for useful service, for meaningful service, in Malawi. There was really no alternative but to accept an assignment of that kind. Kissinger apparently was concerned at the number of officers in the Service with senior rank, I was then a Career Minister, and wanted those people matched with so-called senior assignments that in theory matched the rank. In fact, in the Foreign Service the title often has little relationship to the substantive importance of the job.

Q: Then when you arrived in Malawi what type of activities did you find the most rewarding, and most stimulating, and what was it like to be an Ambassador to a small African post?

BURDETT: Malawi is run almost entirely by President Banda. He is an autocrat who does not tolerate opposition. Educated by American missionaries in Malawi, he eventually graduated as a medical doctor from an American college. I was fortunate to establish a good working relationship with him. This is the key to working in an African country like Malawi. Once the word gets out to other officials that you are in good standing with the President, things are easy to accomplish. Our emphasis in Malawi was: l) on developing economic programs to help this terribly poor nation. 2) on traveling around the country, both for reporting purposes and for public relations purposes to show the people that Americans were interested in them; 3) and most important, on obtaining the support of Malawi for major US foreign policies, especially Vietnam.

Malawi is different from other African countries. Banda personally concentrated on the welfare of his own people-that is, finding ways to help the peasant farmer to grow enough food to feed himself and family and to provide some education and health facilities. He did not involve himself in regional politics as did many of his neighbors. He was not a vocal opponent of white regimes in Southern Africa. Thus he was unpopular among many African leaders and in certain US circles including AF because he was considered to be subservient to South Africa. He took the position that, "I will sup with the devil if he will help me care for my people." That was and, as I understand from the press, remains his main focus. He has done a lot for his people with few resources.

Q: There were various components of that mission and were there any particular problems you had in this respect while you were Ambassador there?

BURDETT: Before my time we had a Peace Corps program in Malawi. The volunteers, however, became involved in local politics. They resented the autocratic nature of President Banda's regime and were in effect talking, and in some cases demonstrating, in favor of greater political freedom. This was intolerable to President Banda, and he threw the Peace Corps out of the country. I was able, once good relations were established with Banda, to suggest to him that Peace Corps volunteers could make a useful contribution to Malawi's economic and social needs. We did this by pointing out that in contrast to earlier generalists, the Peace Corps now had specialists in various fields who were in a sense the equivalent of AID technicians. Thus to meet his needs in agriculture or schools, or medicine, he could request from us X number of volunteers in a designated field. We would then request volunteers and he would have a chance to see their resumes. He agreed to this. This new type of volunteer proved quite successful and won the approval of many Malawians.

Q: That's a very interesting instance you might say of personal diplomacy. Did you find that being in a smaller post that was not a matter of major interest to the United States, and had no crises of major proportions, gave you more leeway to do things as a Chief of Mission than you would have say when you were Charge in Ankara?

BURDETT: There was a noticeable lack of pressure and thus time to visit all parts of the country and to try to become familiar with what one would call the mundane problems that Malawi faced as a developing nation. The main focus of our political reporting was on the conflict between black and white regimes in Southern Africa. This was facilitated by Malawi's status as a "neutral". We were able to report on the rebellion in Mozambique against the Portuguese and on Rhodesia; and we reported extensively on Malawi's different relationship to South Africa.

Q: In meetings with other Chiefs of Mission in the southern part of Africa did you find that you tended to see the problems similarly with respect particularly to South Africa, or were there some divergence of views within the Chiefs of Mission as to what US policies should be?

BURDETT: In meetings with American Chiefs of Mission there were strong differences. I felt that colleagues and officers of AF were emotionally committed to the efforts of the more vocal black leaders (Nyerere and Kaunda were favorites) to overthrow the remaining white regimes; that they equated US national interests with the ambitions of those leaders. There was a tendency to stretch NSC directives, to lend support to the "liberation" campaign, especially to justify the use of force. Insufficient attention was given to the effects on stability in Southern Africa in which the US had an important stake, to the consequences of economic disruption, to the vociferous opposition of these African leaders to major US global policies, and to the opportunities for communist exploitation of their Marxist doctrines. In turn I was regarded as an "outsider" in the AF club, lacking sensitivity to the aspirations of blacks, and tending to condone the oppression of blacks by whites. I was thought to reflect the demeaning attitude of that "South African puppet" Banda.

Within Malawi there was wide divergence of opinions and interests among the Chiefs of Mission. Representatives included-the Ambassador of Zambia strongly opposed to the white regimes especially South Africa; the Israeli representative, one of the few in Africa, generally supportive of South Africa; an active South Africa Charge. The British High Commissioner had his own problems in protecting the large British colony remaining in Malawi and extensive British commercial relations. The Republic of China had an able Ambassador and a very effective agricultural assistance team. The mixture added interest to the assignment and provided reporting opportunities.

Q: You mentioned that one of your achievements as Ambassador to Malawi was the support that President Banda and his government gave to US policies with regard to Vietnam. I would think that would be rather unusual for an African head of state to take that position at that time. Could you explain a little more about how Kamuzu Banda related to his other African chiefs of state?

BURDETT: I believe President Banda was the only African Chief of State to support US policy towards Vietnam, at least publicly. Personally he was strongly anti-Communist. He had ties to the US from his childhood. He valued the economic aid we were able to provide him. His predisposition was probably reinforced by his disagreements with neighboring African heads of state. His approach was always pragmatic, not ideological. Wisely, he refrained from taking part in an ideological or battle of words against South Africa. This put him into conflict with people like Kaunda and Nyerere and who at the same time were vocal critics of our Vietnam policy. On the general question of white South Africa, Banda was often isolated and by some regarded as an Uncle Tom. Malawi, however, benefitted from its connections with South Africa in terms of aid, the immigration of Malawians to work in South African mines, and transport facilities through South Africa. This meant more to President Banda than thumbing his nose at South Africa.

Q: I notice that prior to your service both in Ankara and Malawi that you had had two years as a senior Foreign Service Inspector. Would you please give me some impressions you had of that experience and perhaps some comments how it affected your subsequent assignments in Ankara or as Ambassador?

BURDETT: The Foreign Service Inspection tour was an extremely pleasant one personally for me and for my wife, in that we were able to see parts of the world unknown to us and to become acquainted with peoples of different cultures. The experience was professionally valuable in that one was able to see how successful Chiefs of Mission operated and also to become aware of the deficiencies of those who were not so good. I believe the Foreign Service Inspection Corps plays a very important role in evaluating the operational efficiency of a mission and, as was emphasized by our Inspector General, attempting to evaluate from a distance the appropriateness of US policies toward a given country. The problem faced by the Inspectors in my time was that their recommendations were often ignored both by the posts inspected and the bureaus at home. This was particularly true when one ventured to criticize the so-called strong Ambassadors, or when one differed with policies dear to a particular bureau.

Q: Could you give some examples of that if you feel it is possible?

BURDETT: Giving examples gets very much into personalities which I would prefer to avoid. Instead I will give an example of a highly efficient operation conducted by Ambassador Bill Sullivan in Laos. He had an extraordinarily complex job in supporting the US war effort in Vietnam. I thought he did a marvelous job in carrying out the true role of a Chief of Mission, that is, in directing the totality of the US effort encompassing traditional diplomatic and consular functions, the AID program, covert operations, and the para-military. For example, I can remember a staff meeting when word was received that US pilots had been shot down in a given area. In an amazingly rapid time Bill had US rescue helicopters on the way to pick up those downed pilots. I know that is an extreme example but the point to emphasize is the importance of the Ambassador taking total control of the mission and trying to coordinate not just the State Department operations but that of innumerable other agencies attached to modern day missions. The Inspector can do a useful job in assessing from the outside the success of an Ambassador in this respect. I believe he can be of assistance to the Ambassador, egos permitting, in making suggestions to him about his total Country Team effort.

Another aspect of the Inspection process is the nuts-and-bolts one, evaluating the job done by the post in carrying out regulations and things of that sort, and the adequacy of administrative support. I regard this function as less important but necessary. At times we found over-staffing and recommended cuts, usually resisted strongly by the post.

Q: Yes. I had a similar impression as an Inspector that it was perhaps helpful to embassies in remote areas and Foreign Service posts there to get the feeling that they had access to perhaps another point of view or to people who were going back to the State Department who could reflect some of their views particularly if maybe they felt that they didn't get a full and complete hearing within the post itself.

BURDETT: That is certainly true, especially with respect to small isolated posts. In these circumstances you may have one senior officer and then a number of juniors. The senior officer often wishes and perhaps benefits from an opportunity to talk with one of his own age and range of experience. This overcomes his sense of isolation and perhaps breaks down prejudices he may have developed.

I would mention one other aspect of the inspection process, efficiency reports. It is easier for an outsider to provide a frank, objective report, and the Inspector has the benefit of exposure to a wide cross section of officers enabling him to evaluate relative performance. We made a practice of showing the rated officer his report in draft, and took into account his comments in the final report. "Public Members" were attached to our teams and provided a valuable, different perspective. Sometimes an Inspector detects instances of unfairness in personnel ratings. I found on the whole that rating officers made a strong effort to be fair and objective, but there were instances of prejudice. The tendency was to err on the side of leniency. As you suggest, the Inspector provided an opportunity to officers who felt aggrieved to bare their frustrations and sometimes the Inspector was able to point out that the officer himself was in the wrong.

Q: To revert to one of the earlier points you made about the function of the Inspection Corps, that of looking at the conduct of foreign policy particularly with respect to the bureau in Washington and to the posts in the field, did you feel that there were any major difficulties in transmitting policy or in the relationship between the Foreign Service posts and the Department?

BURDETT: In the best circumstances policies were worked out in close consultation and were mutually understood and supported. At times there were strong disagreements between a post and the Department. Persons serving overseas felt intensely about local causes and were inclined to bend policies approved at the top levels in Washington. More frequently Washington sought to micromanage the carrying out of policy, to impose excessive administrative burdens, and to oblige posts to conform to US fads without regard to local conditions. The theoretical authority of a Chief of Mission was often undercut. For example, in Malawi I sought to close the Defense Attachï¿½ office. Under Pentagon pressure the Department refused to support the proposal.

Q: You are one of what must be a rather small number of Foreign Service officers of your age who had a parent who was in the Foreign Service. Could you contrast the Foreign Service life when you were growing up with the Foreign Service experiences you had during your career, and what now seems to be a somewhat different climate for Foreign Service officers serving abroad?

BURDETT: I think that foreign relations were and are of unmatched importance to the United States and I cannot image a field of greater interest. However, the status of the Foreign Service and its ability to influence policy have deteriorated steadily. Concurrently, the frustrations have grown. I think the treatment of the Foreign Service is deplorable at two levels: 1) at the top level of government in the way Foreign Service career people are denigrated, in the extent to which political appointees are put in high level positions. Foreign Service Officers are made whipping boys for domestic political reasons. The welfare of the US and the ability of the Service to promote it are adversely affected by the growing subordination of foreign policy objectives to domestic political issues, especially those dear to small highly organized special interest groups. 2) The Foreign Service is also ill served by top levels of the State Department. One sees "management for management's sake", and excessive efforts to force the Service to conform to a domestic social agenda, disregarding the peculiarities of service overseas and adverse effects on ability to achieve foreign policy objectives. This is another aspect of the subordination of foreign policy to domestic pressures. "Management" focuses on rights of minorities, rights of women, grievances, providing services, and generally pampering and nannying the Foreign Service. The shift is reflected in the proliferation of Assistant Secretaries and other staff positions at high levels in the Department, and the dwindling portion of resources allotted to substantive work. The management craze in Washington dilutes the authority of the Chief of Mission and his focus on policy matters.

Q: Another thing that has changed perceptively over the last 20 years has been the attention given to the protection of embassy premises and the protection of American diplomats overseas to the point that we have a Diplomatic Security Bureau in the State Department now and a program to make our embassies less vulnerable.

BURDETT: You could say that the tail is wagging the dog. It's quite a dilemma. I encountered the problem first in Jerusalem. To what extent should one give priority to the protection of personnel? If you seek absolute protection you eliminate any useful activity. It's very hard to draw a balance. I've been away so long now that I hesitate to express a view upon whether the balance has gone too far towards providing security. My inclination is to think that it has. In the old days we had many fewer personnel. The State Department career officer was the Embassy. He and his family understood the dangers of life overseas, although different in nature, and were prepared to accept them. For example, in Jerusalem about 10% of our staff became casualties from the fighting. Now in many cases the Foreign Service people are a small fraction of the Embassy, and many employees demand a life similar to that in the US They make emotion laden political appeals for greater protection.

Q: There also seems to be a question of resources available to the State Department, sometimes in contrast to the resources enjoyed by other government departments and agencies. Do you feel that the lack of resources to the substantive functions of the State Department is having an inhibiting affect on its effectiveness?

BURDETT: Yes. I think it's related to the low regard in which the Foreign Service has come to be held, and at the yielding by State, which goes back over years now, to the demands of other domestic agencies to send their own representatives overseas to take over functions that should more appropriately be performed by State.

I'd like to mention another thing that I find distasteful and that seems to have cropped up more in recent years in the Foreign Service, that is the tendency for political in-fighting to develop among the Foreign Service Officers and for "politics" to play an increasing role in determining who receives what assignments upon which in turn depends the future career of a person. In a way it's a question as in domestic politics of who you know, and what have you done for me type of thing, rather than substantive performance of an individual.

The Department seems to break up into tribes represented by the different Bureaus and within those tribe clans often clashing one with another and try to promote their own members.

Q: Well, despite some of these drawbacks that you've pointed out to a Foreign Service career, do you think that were you to consider entering the Foreign Service now, say that you were in your early 20s, how do you think you'd feel about it?

BURDETT: The interest and importance of the substantive work of the Service is such that I would enter again and would encourage others to do so despite the administrative and "political" frustrations involved.

Q: Well, I think that's a very fine point on which to end this interview. But let me ask first, is there any other thing you think that we should have covered in the course of this?

BURDETT: No.

Q: Then I'd like to thank you very much Ambassador Burdett for taking part in this oral history program. Your contribution will be very much appreciated by many in the years to come. Thank you.

BURDETT: I wish to thank you for coming all the way to Gloucester especially in the busy Christmas season. I wish you the best of holidays.

End of interview